APPENDIX C

PUBLIC REVIEW of the DRAFT TRANSPORTATION 2020 GROUND TRANSPORTATION PLAN 2001 UPDATE

State Guide Plan Element 611

Report on the July 12, 2001 Public Hearings Summary of Comments Received and Responses to Comments

Prepared July 30, 2001

R.I. STATEWIDE PLANNING PROGRAM STATE PLANNING COUNCIL One Capitol Hill Providence, RI 02908

I. Overview of Public Involvement Efforts

The 2001 Update is a scheduled update of <u>Transportation 2020 Ground Transportation Plan</u>, State Guide Plan Element 611. <u>Transportation 2020</u> sets state policies and recommends actions for highway systems, bicycle and pedestrian facilities, mass transit, and programs to improve the transportation system's relationship to the environment and the communities it serves. Upon approval, the draft Ground Transportation Plan will cover through 2021 with regular updates every three years.

The public participation process for updating the draft Ground Transportation plan was extensive including four regional public workshops in February and March, 2001. Public surveys on the plan's vision and various transportation conditions, priorities, and issues were distributed at the workshops, posted on the web, and mailed to local officials. Twelve community-based focus groups were held with assistance from The Providence Plan in April in Providence to better assess and respond to the transportation needs of low income, minority and other transportation-disadvantaged citizens. Four subcommittees of the state's Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) met numerous times in April and May to assess and develop recommendations on four major issues which were later incorporated into the plan: transportation and land use, travel corridor analysis, intermodal transportation, and equity and environmental justice in transportation. In addition, input was gained from the work of the Pedestrian Safety Advisory Committee and the RI Department of Transportation (RIDOT), which drafted a Pedestrian Safety Plan, and held a Walkable Communities Conference. Analysis of the Plan update's conformity to state air quality goals was performed by the firm of Vannese. Hangen, Brustlin, Inc. Extensive data and analyses were prepared by RIDOT, RIPTA, and RI Statewide Planning Program staffs.

The preliminary draft of the Plan update was reviewed by the Transportation Advisory Committee at public meetings on May 24, 2001 and June 28, 2001, and by the State Planning Council's Technical Committee on June 8, 2001. It was received by the State Planning Council at their meeting on June 14, 2001, and public hearings were authorized at that time.

II. Report on Public Hearings

Notice of the public hearings on the draft Ground Transportation Plan update and of the opportunity to submit comments were sent to an extensive mailing list of over 450 persons, agencies and groups including chief elected officials, public works directors, and planning officials of all municipalities in the state, as well as other interested persons. Notice of the public hearings and the opportunity to comment was also published in the *Providence Journal* on June 19, 2001. Copies of the Ground Transportation Plan were made available upon request, and the draft was also posted to the Program's website for public review.

The State Planning Council held two public hearings on July 12, 2001 from 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 – 9:00 p.m. in accordance with the Rules of Procedure adopted by the State Planning Council and with Chapter 42-35 of the General Laws, the Administrative Procedures Act. Program staff provided an oral summary of the draft plan, highlighting the changes and additions, at both public hearing sessions. Attachment 1 lists the attendees at the public hearings. The public record remained open until July 20, 2001, for a total of thirty days (eight days following the hearing date). The following summary reflects comments received through the public review process and indicates the Program staff's responses.

III. Comments Received and Responses

A. Comments received at the July 12 public hearings:

1) Mr. Barry Schiller, Transportation Chair, RI Sierra Club (Oral statement)

Mr. Schiller stressed that the Ground Transportation Plan is not the problem; the implementation of the plan is. There were many good ideas in the original plan that were not implemented. He would like someone hired to determine how the transportation funding could be allocated most effectively; he believes we are losing the battle against sprawl and is opposed to the new road to Quonset/Davisville. Priority should be first transit, urban renewal and protecting green space before building new highways. A priority should be to speed up bus traffic through signalization, etc. in order to increase transit use. He believes the new plan for Kennedy Plaza will slow them down.

Under recommendation 2-13, he suggests that a traffic safety issue and an improvement in the quality of life would be to slow traffic in certain areas through traffic calming methods, etc. There are examples of European cities that have made transit work. Driving cars is highly subsidized in the United States; consider increase in gas tax.

Staff Response:

- Plan implementation is a function of many factors which are external to the planning process. The planning process assists implementation by periodically providing decisionmakers and others having control over plan implementation with an updated status of recommendations of the plan and an opportunity to assess and adjust implementation priorities and strategies.
- Transportation funding is allocated by the State Planning Council, with advice from the Transportation Advisory Committee, based upon public input and recommendations of the long range ground transportation plan. The recommendation to hire outside expertise to assist in determining priorities for allocation of transportation funding will be considered in the context of multi-modal travel corridor plans that the state proposes to develop over the next several years.
- Completion of the Quonset Davisville Access Road has been recommended in the Transportation Element of the State Guide Plan since 1998, and is in the State Planning Council approved 2001-2006 TIP as a multi-year project. Substantial investment has occurred in the planning, design, permitting, land acquisition, and initial construction phases of this project.
- The final draft plan recommends many specific measures to improve transit service and lessen the effects of traffic on neighborhoods. The commentor's specific comments have been included, as follows: The recommendation under 2-8 to speed transit service by transit vehicle signal preemption has been reworded (now under 3-8) to "give greater priority to implementation of transit signal preemption. The recommendation under 2-12 has been reworded (now 3-12) to include "working with communities to implement traffic-calming measures to slow traffic speeds in built-up areas", and to "encourage the participation of local residents in the design of traffic calming measures". The

recommendation regarding the gas tax (1-1) has been modified to add that the state "maintain a [gas] tax level appropriate to support the transportation system's needs".

2) Mr. Alan Brodd, Director of Public Works, Town of Cumberland (Oral statement)

- Pedestrian safety issue: Sidewalks of many State corridor roads are in disrepair;
 State does not maintain them and expects local communities to maintain even though many do not have the resources.
- Need state funding to help towns in repairing town roadways and sidewalks, as is done in Massachusetts.
- Funding for traffic calming situations in towns is needed.

Staff Response:

- The final draft plan includes a number of policies and recommendations relating to improvement of pedestrian safety (see part 7, recommendation 4-7). The State (RIDOT) policy to require municipal maintenance of existing sidewalks along statemaintained roads is supported by State statutes and in case law. It is necessitated by a lack of State resources for maintenance of the State highway system. The State does consider sidewalk needs along State-maintained roads, and generally provides sidewalk expansion, improvement, or reconstruction, where warranted, at the time State roads are reconstructed.
- The need for State funding assistance for local pavement management is recognized as important. State legislation authorizing such a program has been enacted, but not funded by the General Assembly. The final draft plan continues the recommendation that the State "establish a grant program for municipalities to help fund local road improvements" (see part 7, recommendation 1-6).
- The recommendation in the final draft plan (see part 7, recommendation 1-6) has been modified to clarify that state funding for municipal roadway improvements, should it be provided, should be eligible for an array of roadway improvements including: "resurfacing, rehabilitation, sidewalks, bike routes, traffic calming, etc."

3) Mr. Paul Reynolds, South Kingston - TAC member (Oral statement)

There is a discretionary program recommended by plan for repaving roads; believes this discretionary funding could be used for sidewalks as well.

Staff Response:

See third bullet under response to commentor #2 above.

4) Mr. Jeffrey Kos, President, Environment Council of Rhode Island (Oral statement)

- Concerned about plan implementation and the coordination with the TIP.
- Wants mass transportation to be a priority (rail and RIPTA bus).

- Opposes large highway projects such as the Quonset freeway.
- Supports Mr. Dulgarian's (see below #6) position on "run-off reduction". Believes this issue should be integrated into the plan

Staff Response:

- The TIP is the implementation program for the long range plan. Projects included in the TIP must be consistent with the policies of the long range plan.
- The final draft plan recommends a number of measures to improve existing transit service, and to further enhance (bus and rail) transit service.
- See third bullet under response to commentor #1 above. Overall, the plan seeks to
 provide a balanced development program designed to enhance transportation choices.
 With regard to highways, the final draft plan continues the investment emphasis on
 preservation and management of current highway infrastucture, with very limited
 additions of new highway capacity.
- See fourth bullet under response to commentor #6 below.

5) Ms. Elizabeth Schiller (Oral statement)

- The Transportation Plan includes good things for pedestrians. Sidewalks need to be improved.
- Traffic lights should be timed in order that pedestrians could cross safely. Many
 pedestrians can not cross as quickly as the present timing would require, especially
 at Memorial Blvd. [by the Providence Mall] which the speaker believes is a
 nightmare. More priority should be given to pedestrians.
- Right turns by automobiles during red traffic lights are frequently a problem for pedestrians.
- Supports the new speed bump in front of the State House.
- More funding should go towards sidewalk repair, traffic lights, buses, and bike routes rather than on roads.
- Opposes the new Quonset freeway, as it will mean a loss of 50 acres of open space.

Staff Response:

- See bullet one under response to commentor #2 above.
- Recommendation 2-7, on page 7.5—7.7 provide for higher priority to pedestrian travel needs. The third bullet, on page 7.6 calls for pedestrian signal cycle timings to be assessed (in light of the aging population) to provide adequate safe crossing times.

- Funding allocations to projects are made via the Transportation Improvement Program, based upon policies of the long range plan. This update of the long range plan includes many policies supporting funding allocations for pedestrian, bicycle and transit projects.
- See third bullet under response to commentor #1 above.

6) Mr. Grant Dulgarian, Ecology Action of Rhode Island (Oral statement)

 Would like signage directing traffic to alternate routes in Rhode Island instead of the directional signs that is currently existing:

I-295 instead of I-95

US 1 instead of Rt. 138 in Kingston

Rt. 2 & I-95 in Connecticut to go to Newport via Rt. 2 and Rt. 78 rather than Exit 3 & thru Rt. 138.

Providence to URI should direct to I-95 to 4 to 102/2 to Rt. 138 rather than 4 to 1 to Rt. 138.

Signage Providence to Newport is inconsistent with signage Newport to Providence.

- RI should connect Providence and Newport by rail which speaker feels would revitalize downtown, help tourism and economic development.
- The gas tax used to go to the General Fund; now it goes towards transportation and it is said more is needed. There should be an analysis on the effect of the car tax elimination.
- Drainage is being ignored in certain situations of road work. There should be run-off reduction or elimination.

Staff Response:

- Recommendation 3-15, calls for using highway signs to direct traffic to appropriate alternate routes. Several of the alternatives suggested by the commentor have been added to the recommendation, as examples which could be explored.
- The Plan recommends, under 4-9, several rail transit initiatives, including enhancing rail passenger service between Boston and Providence, initiating service to the Warwick Intermodal Station (upon its completion), and completing studies and designs for extending rail passenger service on the Amtrak mainline south of Warwick. Studies of transit service alternatives on Aquidneck Island, and possible future connection (via the MBTA) to Fall River and Boston are also underway. The plan does not endorse creating a direct rail connection between Providence and Newport, as this would require major capital investment (construction of new rail bridges across the Seekonk River and Mt. Hope Bay, restoration of the East Side rail tunnel, new rail line through southern Bristol) and possibly the displacement of the East Bay Bike Path.

 A new section in Part Seven has been added, consolidating recommendations dealing with Transportation and the Environment. Items under Recommendations 5-4 address management of highway runoff to improve water quality. Comments will be provided to RIDOT for consideration in project implementation.

7) Mr. Ray Alexander, Narragansett Wheelman – TAC member (Oral statement)

- Need for statewide <u>on-road</u> bicycle system to supplement the bike paths.
- Lack of bridge access: bicycles are prohibited on Newport bridge; bicycles are allowed on the Jamestown bridge but not on access to the bridge; without any warning to the bicycle community, bicycles on the Sakonnet bridge were recently prohibited.

Staff Response:

- The seventh item under recommendation 4-7, calls for the "designation of on-road bicycle routes by striping and signing to be accelerated."
- The sixth item under recommendation 4-7, calls for "a safe and convenient means for providing bicycle access across the Pell, Jamestown, Mt. Hope, and Sakonnet River bridges".
- Comments will be provided to RIDOT for consideration in project implementation.

B. Other comments received during the comment period:

- 8) Mr. Mark Robson, Member Economic Development Committee, Richmond, RI (emailed comment, received June 22, 2001).
 - Plan should address Route 138, the major east-west corridor in Richmond, which is in poor condition, and has traffic congestion.
 - Sidewalks are needed along Route 138. The Town has requested these in the past.
 - Proposal in the plan to provide sign alternative routes to Route 138 will only affect through traffic, and not help residents.
 - Proposal to protect open space is supported, and funding should be earmarked for Richmond.
 - Consider expanded RIPTA service for Richmond, such as a stop at the 138/I-95 interchange.

Staff Response:

- Individual projects are selected during the Transportation Improvement Program
 preparation, from proposals submitted by municipalities, state agencies, and the
 public. No proposals were received from the Town of Richmond during the last TIP
 solicitation. Recommendation 2-6, on page 7.5, calls for the state to embark on a
 travel corridor analysis planning process to address the needs of major routes such
 as Route 138. This process will include examination of land use and transportation
 interactions and will address the needs of all travel modes.
- The rationale behind the recommendation to provide signage to direct through traffic to alternative routes, is that the diversion of through traffic would lessen traffic congestion overall, thereby improving travel conditions and times for local traffic.
- The plan's policies and recommendations supporting protection of open space have been retained (policy 4-C and recommendation 5-2). Under state law and regulations, state and federal funding are allocated to local protection projects via open, competitive processes.
- The plan recognizes the need for transit services within suburban and rural areas, but realizes that conventional, fixed route services are not appropriate or cost-effective for all locations. Recommendation 3-9, calls for providing a mix of services (fixed route, point deviation, demand-response, carpooling, vanpooling) in suburban areas, and recommendation 6-2, calls for the state/RIPTA to "work with towns in suburban and rural areas to expand demand-response and flex route systems to improve transit access" (to jobs and essential services).
- Comments will be provided to RIDOT and RIPTA for consideration in project implementation.

Note: The 30 day comment period, and record of the public hearing remained open through the close of business on July 20, 2001.

ATTACHMENTS:

- 1. Registered attendance at the public hearings
- 2. Written comments received during the public comment period

Attachment 1:

List of Registered Attendees at the Public Hearings July 12, 2001 TRANSPORTATION 2020 GROUND TRANSPORTATION PLAN 2001 UPDATE

Attendance for Public Hearing 7/12/01, Afternoon Session RI Dept. of Administration, Conference Room A One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI

Sign In/Record of Attendance

Record of Speakers

Barry Schiller Transportation Chair RI Sierra Club Providence

Alan Brodd Director of Public Works Town of Cumberland

Paul Reynolds (TAC member)
President
Kingston Improvement Association

Others in Attendance

Bryan Slack Transportation Planner Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission Worcester, Mass.

Lee R. Whitaker (TAC member)
Director of Planning
Town of East Greenwich

Michael D. Cassidy **(TAC member)**Director of Planning and Redevelopment
City of Pawtucket

Alicia Karpick Director Sierra Club Rhode Island Kevin Flynn
City Planning Director
City of Cranston

Fred Vincent **(TAC member)**RI Dept. of Environmental Management

Jane Sherman (TAC member)
The Providence Plan

Mark Therrien (TAC member) RIPTA

Robert Shawver (**TAC member**) RI Dept. of Transportation

Harriet Holbrook RIPTA

Statewide Planning Program Staff

John O'Brien – Chief, Statewide Planning & Secretary, State Planning Council George Johnson – Assistant Chief, Statewide Planning Walter Slocomb – Principal Planner Vincent Flood – Principal Research Technician Ronnie Sirota - Senior Planner

Attendance for Public Hearing 7/12/01, Evening Session RI Dept. of Administration, Conference Room A One Capitol Hill, Providence, RI

Sign In/Record of Attendance

Record of Speakers

Jeffrey Kos President, Environment Council of RI

Elizabeth Schiller North Providence

Grant Dulgarian Ecology Action of RI

Ray Alexander (TAC member)
Narragansett Wheelman

Others in Attendance

Bill Dunn Warwick

Katherine Trapani (TAC member)
RI Economic Development Corporation

Paul Reynolds (TAC member) South Kingstown

Jim Suzman
Director of Public Works
Town of Smithfield

Eugenia Marks Audubon Society RI

Robert Quigley **(TAC member)**Aquidneck Island Planning Commission

Rachel Ede, RIPTA, representing Mark Therrien, RIPTA, **(TAC member)**

Statewide Planning Program Staff

John O'Brien – Chief, Statewide Planning & Secretary, State Planning Council George Johnson – Assistant Chief, Statewide Planning Michael Moan – Principal Planner Ronnie Sirota – Senior Planner